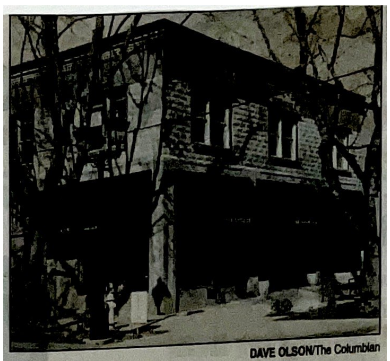

DAVE OLSON/The Columbian

The Farrell Building at 305 N.E. 4th Ave. in Camas.

Notebook:

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Numerous Combs siblings have pitched in with money and time, and one sister has opened Camas Antiques on the first floor.

Camas Antiques has been open for a year now, and the Combs family is marking that milestone — along with the near-completion of the residential second floor — with a big open house from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

Visitors will be able to explore the eight apartments — five one-bedroom units and three studios — and admire some of the early infrastructure of downtown Camas while they're at it.

For example, during a preview last week Combs opened a telephone junction box. He said when his workers cut the ancient wires they figured must have been obsolete for decades, phones up and down Fourth Avenue went dead. (Telephone service to the rest of the block has since been rerouted around the Farrell building.)

And see if you can spot the new wall that's blocking off what once was a "green room" for actors performing at what was then called the Granada Theater next door. From the second floor of the Farrell building, Combs said, thespians used to slip in and out backstage.

"It's the most recognizable building in downtown Camas," Combs said, "and it's been vacant for years. The city has been very excited about us restoring it."

County and state officials have also welcomed the project. The building is up for inclusion on three historical registers — county, state and national — and Combs said he's found the tax incentives and other benefits far outweigh the hassle of preservation work.

"They want you to stick with the historical look of the building, which was fine with us," Combs said.

He's frankly glad the upstairs was in a time warp for decades. If it had been updated, he said, the historical look and charm of the interior could well be gone.

A public hearing on the county historical designation is set for 6 p.m. March 29th at the O.O. Howard House, 750 Anderson St. in Vancouver.

Roadside glory

Why stand by the side of the freeway, bending and scraping, while huge metal projectiles go tearing by?

Just to make things prettier. And for the glory, of course.

The state Department of Transportation showered such glory on recent weekend picker-uppers who volunteered to scour sections of state Highway 14.

The 26 Georgia-Pacific employees, from the company's consumer products and technical operations departments, gathered roadway litter for eight hours on March 5 from 15th Street in Washougal to west of Lady Island — a stretch approximately four miles long. They filled more than 250 trash bags.

And on March 6, eight members of the Kiwanis Club of Cascade Park and the Mountain View Key Club filled 40 bags, covering state Highway 14 from Interstate 205 to the Southeast 164th Avenue exit.

All told, the groups pulled 3,800 pounds of trash and put it where it belongs.

"This is a huge amount of litter that these dedicated folks removed from our highway in a relatively short time frame — equivalent to the weight of a full-size sedan," said regional transportation administrator Don Wagner.

Cost to taxpayers: a $182.68 disposal fee. The state departments of transportation and ecology together spend approximately $5 million a year on litter cleanup; volunteer labor saves the state about $250,000 a year.

Program coordinator Sharon Morgan said she's got 40 local groups, from churches and school clubs to private individuals and families, volunteering to do the roadway dirty work.

"They can be private people, they can be clubs," said Morgan, who added "It cannot be anything political or politically incorrect."

It would be interesting to see that put to the test. In January, Adopt-A-Highway signs along a rural route near Salem, Ore., credited the American Nazi Party with beautifying that particular stretch of road. Earlier in the month, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment guarantees the Ku Klux Klan the right to participate in that state's Adopt-A-Highway program.

Even with those 40 groups, plus a good deal of convict labor working to keep highway shoulders spiffy, Morgan said there's always room for more highway beautification in Clark County.

"The worst is any place there's fast food restaurants," she said.

The stretch of I-5 from Northeast 78th to 99th streets — with Hazel Dell Avenue to the west and Highway 99 to the east — once accumulated 1,000 pounds of trash in two weeks, she said.

Meanwhile state Highway 504, the beautiful route of choice to Mount St. Helens, enjoys more than its fair share of volunteer interest who want to make sure it stays scenic, Morgan said.

To find out more about Washington's Adopt-A-Highway program, visit www.wsdot.wa.gov/biz/adoptahwy or call Morgan at 360-905-2131.

The state supplies instructions, hard hats, reflective vests, one rotating light for the top of somebody's car, trash bags and payment of any medical bills that might arise — though, Morgan said, she's never seen anybody get hurt doing Adopt-A-Highway work.

"The main thing we want is safety," she said.